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Q&A

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U.S. defense cuts worry French expert

Francois Heisbourg on NATO defense strategy

At 35, Francois Heisbourg is well established as one of West Europe's principal defense thinkers and planners. France's FAR — Force d'Action Rapide — was his own brainchild while he worked as international affairs adviser to Charles Hernu, the French defense minister. This 47,000-man rapid deployment force is now operational.

Mr. Heisbourg has long been familiar with the United States. The son of a French diplomat, he was educated at the French Lycee in Washington, graduated from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris and went on to the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, the key to success in French public life. By the time he was 28, he was already deputy head of economic affairs at the Foreign Ministry. Before he was 30, he was promoted to the ministry's policy planning council. After the Socialists won the elections in 1981, Mr. Hernu selected him as the civil service's outstanding "comer" and made him his principal foreign affairs advisor.

His first book — which he wrote on weekends — was "Emiliano Zapata and the Mexican Revolution" (1978). He resigned from the Defense Mininstry last summer to become vice president in charge of international affairs at Thompson-International, Europe's largest military electronics group.

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Q: But isn't France the last country in Europe with a multipartisan defense policy?

A: We are the last country about which that can be said. What surprises Europeans about Central America is that a) there is no real consensus in your body politic — the bipartisan Kissinger Commission report notwithstanding — about your vital interests and how they should be dealt with, and b) that things that normally should not be seen are spread all over your front pages and TV programs.

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FEATURES/COLUMNISTS

Q&A

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Q: Armand Hammer, who has enjoyed a special relationship with successive Soviet leaders since Lenin and who told us after a trip to Moscow in early 1980 that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would be only a brief police action, now says after a long, private chat with President Chernenko, that if we pledge non-first use of nuclear weapons, the way will be open to a new era of detente. How do you interpret this latest message?

A: The Soviets have been pushing this gambit for years and years. There's no way one could verify such a pledge in advance, and the only way to prove that you're not respecting your pledge is in actual warfare. So it's a measure that has no concrete military effect per se.

On the other hand, non-first use is a psychologically disarming, disabling measure. We have public opinion in Western democracies that could attempt to force upon us unilateral modifications in force levels following a non-first use pledge. Such pressures do not exist on the Eastern side.

So it's a trap. And if we swallow Mr. Hammer's recipe for detente, we will have dealt ourselves a grave strategic setback. Public opinion sees this gimmick as harmless cosmetics for detente; experts know better.

Q: In the early '70s, when President Nixon and Brezhnev launched Detente I, the two superpowers agreed that rough nuclear parity had been acheived. SALT I, the ABM Treaty and a score of other bilateral agreements were signed on the basis of parity.

Then in '75, shortly after final defeat in Vietnam, President Ford and Brezhnev, along with 30-odd European heads of state and government, signed the Helsinki accords on European security. As everyone hailed yet another new era of detente, the Soviets began secretly manufacturing the SS-20 missile that same year. A few weeks after Helsinki they also began deploying Cuban proxy troops in Africa.

Starting in 1977, the new SS-20s were deployed at the rate of one per week, principally targeted against Western Europe. This arsenal now stands at 387 [each with three warheads] and they are building sites for at least 100 more. Was all this an attempt to change nuclear parity into superiority, as they tried to find a shortcut to parity by putting missiles into Cuba in '62?

A: Politically and strategically, the SS-20s changed the balance of nuclear power in Europe which, by definition, means the world balance of power.

The aim was to decouple the Western alliance. The SS-20s cannot hit the lower 48 states of the United States, but they can destroy all of Western Europe, both its military assets and population centers. By weakening the security of Europe, the Soviets were hoping to achieve a major shift in the global correlation of forces in their favor by changing the European balance of power.

Q: The NATO response was to deploy 572 Pershing IIs and cruise missiles. Do you think a new Soviet peace offensive, a new detente, will derail this deployment before it's completed, with countries like Belgium and Holland changing their minds?

A: That is a great danger. The new so-called peace offensive may very well have the effect of freezing Belgian and Dutch intentions. This could be the first Soviet wedge into the deployment countries' front.

The Soviets will also doubtless try to obtain a withdrawal of some of the Pershing and cruise missiles already deployed. At the very least, they will insist on a freeze. Their first objective will be to get the Belgians and the Dutch to deal themselves out of the game.

Q: For the first three years of the Reagan administration, the Soviets and their assets convinced tens of millions, on both sides of the Atlantic, that we were on the brink of a global nuclear holo-

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cause and that Ronald Reagan was responsible. Now there is much talk about Detente II. What happened?

A: Europeans are always surprised by the rapidity of shifts in the presentation of strategic and geopolitical problems on your side of the Atlantic.

Q: So you don't think it was Chernenko waving an olive branch in private conversations that produced this latest shift?

A: Of course not. What one does see, however, is serious centrifugal pressure in the U.S. body politic in both major parties to find a rationale for cutting back on defense spending. This is also congruent with the language used by the Americans since the president's so-called "star wars" — or SDI — speech, in which the perspective is laid down of a world in which man would have "disinvented" nuclear weapons. SDI would somehow make them redundant.

Unfortunately, we do live in a world with nuclear weapons and they do ensure peace through deterrence. There is no way of putting that genie back in the bottle.

But by planning a situation in which world peace could be achieved without nuclear weapons, the Americans have been casting grave doubts on the way world security has been achieved in the past 30 years, and on whether it can continue to be achieved that way in the future.

So we're not really surprised to see that all of a sudden, in the wake of SDI, we now have a very broad front aligned against the development of new strategic weapons — like MX — and advocating the reduction of defense spending in the United States to levels which could have been considered shameful if they were being suggested by the European allies.

If the Europeans only show a 1 percent real increase in defense spending, they usually get beaten over the head by the Americans. Now, without any warning, in the space of a few days, we see the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Barry Goldwater, moving from 7 or 8 percent real increase in defense spending a year to zero growth or 1 percent. It is very difficult for allies to live with such drastic swings. One day we're told how essential growth is to keep up with the Soviets, and next day we're told it's fine if there's no growth.

Q: Does this translate into U.S. unreliability?

A: I'd say unpredictability. The Euromissile deployment has, in a sense, strengthened U.S. reliability. The strategic situation has thus improved.

But I see two major pitfalls:

1. Whatever R&D money or seed funds are available for defense now will be siphoned off largely into "star war" type initiatives that strike us as irrelevant for a very long time to come, and certainly not relevant to the strategic balance except as arcane arguments in academic circles.

2. The so-called new detente. One gets the impression, again all of a sudden, that arms control is being embraced as a consequence, as an element of a new detente without any strategic objectives being defined — and all this, of course, above the heads of the Europeans.

Q: Talking about strategic objectives not being defined, how do you interpret the new Weinberger doctrine on the use of U.S. military power anywhere in the world? One European intelligence director told me it removes the key ingredient of deterrence — the element of uncertainty — and that all the men in the Kremlin have to do now is keep Weinberger's six caveats in their sights and make sure the conditions are never fulfilled as they continue to pursue their strategic objectives through their proxies with unconventional warfare, from state-sponsored terrorism to disinformation.

A: Laying down in advance the thresholds, limits, parameters, is counterproductive and hurts our collective defense efforts. Deterrence can only be achieved with a high degree of uncertainty.

We should never forget the former SEcretary of State Dean Acheson precedent a few months before the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in 1950. Acheson had omitted South Korea from a list of vital U.S. interests.

One always forgets something when one draws up lists of essential and non-essential interests. There are always gray areas. So if you draw a red line, either you're including too much or you're excluding somebody or something you shouldn't.

Effective deterrence by definition means fuzziness. If everything is cut and dried beforehand, then you're tying your hands and giving your strategy away to the adversary.

I respect Secretary Weinberger's speech. It aims very high and is a responsible attempt to revitalize the role of military force vis-a-vis other modes of action, be they diplomatic, economic or covert — an approach that has been lacking in the past few years. However, in my judgment, the new roadmap is far too detailed.

Q: Doesn't the doctrine as now redefined impact on our allies' assumption of automatic involvement under the Atlantic Treaty in case of attack by a Warsaw Pact country? What do you assume would happen if East Germany made an overnight grab for West Berlin and the Soviets told us they would like to negotiate the crisis in Geneva next Wednesday? Or if the Soviets occupied northern Norway on the pretext that their access to Murmansk was being threatened?

A: Two very different but not implausible scenarios. U.S., French and British troops are stationed in West Berlin, so U.S. involvement would be automatic.

Q: Where? In Berlin? Or along the whole Central European front?

A: Along the whole front.

Q: In other words, West Berlin would mean war?

A: Well, it has to. No way the Soviets could crack the Berlin nut without war.

Q: Western public opinion didn't want to go to war over Danzig which was under the League of Nations protection — and Hitler took it over.

A: There were no allied forces involved in Danzig. There are several thousand U.S., French and British troops in West Berlin today — from the three Western nuclear powers. The risk is much too great for Moscow.

But the second scenario, in northern Norway, is more worrying in the sense that there are no non-Norwegian forces at the ready in that region, and the question is therefore more open. All the more reason to have highly mobile forces capable of reacting very quickly.

Q: But if a lightning strike is launched against northern Norway, won't a new generation now invoke the Weinberger doctrine to argue that the U.S. national interest is not affected?

A: What is lacking in that doctrine is a very strong and crystal-clear reaffirmation of U.S. obligations under the treaties in

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existence, including the automatic aspects of mutual defense under NATO.

Q: What credibility does the United States have if it cannot threaten limited military action without first conducting a public opinion poll?

A: In France we say one must not confuse democracy with demoscopy — the art of photographing public opinion through scientific polls.

Limited actions or wars can never be guaranteed to be popular. It is up to the political leadership to convince and lead public opinion. If we now have to take someone's temperature in order to save life elsewhere, then we are not talking about democracy, but anarchy.

Q: But don't these new caveats mean that even the threat of military action is no longer credible as a foreign policy tool?

A: In a sense, the War Powers Act already has that effect, and Weinberger is not really innovating. U.S. hands are already tied by Congress.

Q: The notion is now about that the first four years of the Reagan administration were devoted to rebuilding America's military power and credibility and resolve and that the United States can now negotiate detente from strength. Agree?

A: In political terms, yes. The restoration of the nuclear balance of forces in Europe certainly creates the conditions for renewed dialogue — leading right out of the one the Soviets broke off unilaterally last eyar.

Militarily, if you draw the balance sheet, when we Europeans take the long view, we see that the United States reduced military spending by about 30 percent in real terms during the '70s, that it has made up part of that decline since 1980, but certainly not all of it.

The European allies, on the other hand, increased their real spending by 30 percent during the '70s, while the United States was going down, and they have continued to increase defense expenditures at a slow but steady rate since 1980. So in military terms, we don't have the impressions that the United States has demonstrated such a high degree of resolve as some seem to believe.

Q: Can America's adversaries believe in U.S. resolve when Congress won't even grant the administration's $21 million request to fund the Contras in Nicaragua? What does a $300 billion defense budget mean in that context?

A: A good but difficult question. The Europeans note there's no bipartisan policy. Central America is far from Europe — not a traditional area of concern to Europeans. It is very close to the heart of U.S. interests yet many prominent Americans don't see it that way. The equivalent for us would be sub-Saharan Africa. France has intervened militarily there several times in recent years. There has always been multipartisan backing — with the exception of the Communists — for what political opinion sees as vital European interests.

Q: But isn't France the last country in Europe with a multipartisan defense policy?

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There is no need to write a CIA field manual to teach guerrillas unconventional warfare. As Talleyrand would have said, it's worse than a crime; it's a mistake.

Q: How important is ET — the emerging non-nuclear technologies, such as Precision-Guided Munitions [PGM] — for Europe's defense, and can allied countries afford them?

A: Emerging technologies are crucial. The ET label is unfortunate in that it conveys something exotic and out-of-reach — a sort of "star wars" fantasy. But these new technologies already exist, and the European defense industry is extraordinarily strong in such fields as sensor technology, miniaturization, information microprocessing capability, integrated battlefield communications systems, etc.

From a U.S. perspective, the Europeans have a surprising advantage in presently fielded combat control and communications systems. The French and Belgian armies today are the only ones in the West to have them operational.

Q: So how can other forces in West Germany, such as German, American and British, communicate with those that have moved to the next generation of microprocessed communications? Are they compatible?

A: That is a question which the U.S. Army has posed, and its conclusion has been to acquire a similar system.

Q: How does ET affect the nuclear threshold?

A: There's been a lot of ink on that one. If conventional technology can do the job that was militarily assigned to battlefield nuclear weapons in the integrated NATO doctrine, then so much the better. There's no problem on this score for France as the French have never considered tactical nuclear weapons as a substitute for conventional firepower on the battlefield.

That's why we call them "prestrategic" rather than tactical nuclear weapons, as their use clearly would escalate the conflict into nuclear war, which is unacceptable.

So if NATO is moving toward a doctrine where frontline battlefield nuclear weapons can be replaced by very precise conventional weapons, then the nuclear threshold will be that much higher. The risk of nuclear war would be greatly reduced.

Q: The Nunn resolution, which was defeated in the Senate, called for the phasing out of U.S. ground forces from Europe unless the Europeans do more for their own defense. What impact would that have if it were to come up again and be approved — accommodation with the Soviets under the guise of a new European security treaty, or a closing of ranks and military unification to pick up the slack?

A: Coming from Sen. Sam Nunn, a staunch advocate of a strong NATO and a widely respected defense authority, the message was received loud and clear and had a positive military impact — e.g., the $7.5 billion just approved to improve NATO infrastructure and readiness. The medium in this case was indeed the message. If it had come from a neo-isolationist, the effect would have been devastatingly counter-productive.

But even with the Nunn resolution, there has been an element of political overkill. What the Germans have to say about it is not all that friendly. It encourages those who look for their salvation in the new security arrangements with Eastern neighbors. So the Nunn blockbuster, as it were, should not be used twice because then it would start creating more political damage than can be use-

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fully offset by any positive military impact.

Q: Lewis Lehrman, a Republican hopeful for 1988, says the United States now largely provides for the defense of Western Europe and the time is at hand for a European Defense Union to come together in a united defense effort — a much more substantial financial effort, that would allow the United States to reduce gradually defense expenditures abroad, as the European allies built up theirs — and that the United States could then better protect, through SDI, the Western Hemisphere and Western Europe. Fact or fancy?

A: Strictly theory. Western Europe already spends a great deal on defense. France spends 4 percent of GNP on the military — with a conscripted army to boot. If you added the cost of a volunteer army, France would be over 5 percent. This isn't too far from the 7 percent of GNP for America, which is, after all, a superpower. And if Congress opts for a total defense freeze as advocated by Sen. Goldwater, then France would be considerably ahead of the United States.

Western Europe is not a superpower and cannot become one through congressional reolutions. Moreover, SDI does not exist. Europeans, like many Americans, are extraordinarily skeptical about the possibilities of it ever becoming operational, certainly not for the rest of this century.

The United States cannot shed its own very special responsibilities as the world's only countervailing power. Virtually every area of the world is strategic for the United States, from the North Cape to the Cape of Good Hope, from the Panama Canal to the Persian Gulf. Europe, on the other hand, is composed of a number of medium-size countries which are not global powers, even if some, like France, have interests outside the NATO theater.

We have been working very hard to revitalize the Western European Union, but if we go too far too fast, we would only antagonize the United States by conveying the impression of a competitive global power center.

One cannot base strategic assumptions on non-existent components — and SDI is just such a component. This is not to say that R&D for SDI shouldn't be pursued vigorously — if only to be quite sure that in the event of a Soviet breakthrough, the United States wouldn't be left in the lurch, subject to geopolitical blackmail. But there's a vast difference between a technological watchdog stance and entering an all-embracing system, which is apparently the objective given the $26 billion requested for R&D alone over five years.

Q: But that seems to be a non-starter under Goldwater's all-embracing freeze.

A: Our hope is that such funds would be spent on R&D with applications that are directly relevant to the balance of forces in the world today, rather than on schemes that elicit more skepticism than hope.

Q: C3I is the latest ET jargon for Command, Control, Communication, Intelligence. It refers to very-high-speed microprocessor technology, which will be moving from three microns to 1.25 to half a micron [one thousandth of a millimeter] by the end of this decade. Effectiveness will reportedly increase a hundredfold in 10 years. What does all this translate to in practical combat terms?

A: The ET debate is fascinating because for many people, including the learned defense academics, it means having new-fangled and very costly weapons to replace older weapons. But that's not what it's about.

ET, linked as it is to the miniaturization and the interconnection of information processing capabilities, can have a tremendous force-multiplying effect on existing weapons.

In France, we have spent the equivalent of the cost of 10 tanks to equip each armored division [with 300-plus tanks] with a battlefield communications system that has increased their effectiveness by a ratio of 1.5 to 2. This is a very cost-effective solution. Another way is to plug into existing systems new information-processing capability.

Take an old 500-pound iron bomb and screw onto it a sensor or a laser-guided device and you have a terminally-guidable weapon which is 50 or 100 times more effective than it was before. The same goes for combat aircraft. The Mirage IVs were built in the late '50s as were the B-52s in the United States. Their effectiveness has been multiplied several times in their lifetime with constant retrofits of electronic countermeasures, navigation aids and so forth. Without major cost expenditures, they are much more capable systems.

Q: The new NATO doctrine is called FOFA [Follow-on Forces Attack], which means ET will enable PGM to counterattack against Warsaw Pact forces in their rear, and thus prevent reserves from concentrating and moving forward. Doesn't the Soviet Union already have a deep, holding-the-lines capability, not only with its pre-positioned "Fifth Column," but with its thousands of fighter-bombers with ordnance designed to knock out airstrips?

A: The Soviets have two deep-strike weapons — Spetsnaz, the special forces trained to fight in a semi-clandestine mode with national fifth columns already in place; and the so-called Operational Maneuver Groups.

Since their Zapad [West] 81 maneuvers, the Soviets have switched to heavy reliance on the deep attack concept and to the kind of strategic deception that enables them to move very swiftly, with virtually no early warning, from a peace posture to full war footing. Any warning we might get would be exceedingly short and deliberately ambiguous.

This places a great deal of importance on 1] similar deep attack response capabilities on the Western side, which is indeed happening, and 2] very rapidly deployable forces, such as France's almost 50,000-strong Force d'Action Rapide [FAR], in a constant state of alert to face a bolt-out-of-the-blue situation.

Q: The Union Carbide tragedy in India and the recent sabotage of NATO fuel pipelines by terrorists would seem to indicate that Western Europe's enormous concentrations of industry makes war in our rear far more potentially disruptive than would be the case in Warsaw Pact nations. Couldn't a highly sophisticated ET battle situation break down when confronted with Russia's massive, idiot-proof weapons systems?

A: Western Europe does not have geographical depth. Our strategic rear is the United States. That's why the defense of the two sides of the Atlantic is inextricably intertwined. And those who talk of a separate European defense system don't know what they're talking about. Only the Atlantic alliance provides credibility.

The Bhopal catastrophy killed more than 2,000 Indians with a chemical byproduct or pesticide — which brings us to chemical warfare. We do not consider these

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easy-to-make chemical weapons conventional.

The Soviets do, and most of their units are equipped and trained to wage chemical warfare — both offensive and defensive capabilities. This poses a direct challenge to our forces that until now has not really been addressed. Bhopal shows that it's high time we did some serious thinking about the problem — the gray area between conventional and nuclear warfare.

NATO doctrine today is to respond to a chemical attack with tactical nuclear weapons. I do not believe that would be a proper response.

Q: What is the general European view of SDI — a triple or quadruple canopy, non-nuclear missile defense? If each tier or layer is designed to intercept 90 percent of incoming missiles, the last barrier should, in theory, allow less than one to land [8,000 x 0.1 to the power of four]. If it existed today, wouldn't it enhance overall Western security or, as critics argue, would it decouple the alliance?

A: Assuming that it would work against ballistic missiles, I'm not sure the Europeans would find it all that relevant.

We are not only under the threat of hundreds of Soviet missiles, but also thousands of nuclear-capable aircraft. We've been trying to shoot down aircraft for 70 years and we've got better and better at it, but the aircraft builders are also getting better and better at getting through air defenses.

So the nuclear threat against Europe would not go away even if SDI became 100 percent effective both for the United States and Western Europe. You'd still have to face cruise missiles, fighter-bombers and all sorts of other nuclear vectors.

What surprises Europeans is that in Europe we've been paying a great deal of attention to the air-defense threat — installing the Hawk missile system, replacing the Nike Hercules by the Patriots, developing our own successor to Hawk, and so forth. We also have hundreds of interceptor aircraft.

The United States, by contrast, practically has no air defense — a few hundred aging aircraft and a few anti-aircraft missile batteries. The Soviets are moving toward sea-launched cruise missiles and the air-launched cruise from Blackjack long-range bombers, against which the United States is virtually defenseless.

SDI, even if it existed and were operational, wouldn't plug that gaping hole in America's defenses.

The problem I have is that we have to reason within real time frames. Would SDI decouple the alliance? Not necessarily. America was invulnerable in the '50s, and Europe felt very secure. So if America became invulnerable again through SDI, it does not follow that Europe goes its own neutral way.

The fact is that SDI does not exist, won't exist as far as anyone can peer into the future, and yet strategic thinking is beginning to assume its existence. That in itself can have a decoupling effect — especially if most of your military R&D money goes into SDI research, funds that would be better spent reinforcing the conventional capabilities of the alliance.

Q: And yet a non-nuclear defense system on a space-based platform seems to be Moscow's principal concern. Why? They started a crash research program in space-based laser or high energy beams some 15 years ago. Does their concern stem from the feeling they are being overtaken by the United States?

A: Two principal concerns. The first is the mirror-image syndrome, as it were. Soviet leaders feel they have to keep up if they want to maintain their global credibility. Space is the new high ground. The Soviets have admittedly done a lot of research in this field but if one looks at the outward signs of any results, such as tests, one does not get the impression that they have gotten very far. U.S. tests, on the other hand, such as the Minuteman intercept by a non-nuclear projectile, are most impressive and have clearly shaken the Soviets.

We should be very prudent in trying to assess the scope of comparable capabilities on the Soviet side. So far nothing has been detected that begins to match the Americans. I would recommend an ongoing R&D effort as insurance against an incipient Soviet breakthrough.

That is quite different from saying the Soviets have already launched a "star wars' program and the United States is only following.

The Soviets' second object of preoccupation — as I guess it would be for the Americans — is that all of this is going to cost tremendous amounts of money. The Soviets cannot afford it, but politically they can extract it much more easily than the U.S. administration can obtain the funding from Congress.

There's no David Stockman running around the corridors of the Kremlin telling Defense Minister Ustinov that he's going to have to take major cuts because entitlement programs can't be squeezed any further. In fact, it's probably the reverse that is happening.

And if one looks at Pravda, a recent editorial warned that if "star wars" went ahead, more offensive ICBMs were going to have to be added on to existing stockpiles so as to make sure that they could overcome any kind of space barrier put up by the United States.

The Soviets don't like spending money any more than we Westerners do. They want to win at the lowest possible cost. But in real life, we do have negative sum situations, and SDI looks like just a situation for both sides.

Q: The Western European defense concensus is deeply fractured. The alternative governments in the United Kingdom [Labor, Social Democrats, Liberal] and in West Germany [Socialists and Greens] would mean a hybrid pacifist/neutralist Western Europe, nuclear-free zones, etc.. Wouldn't that mean the end of NATO through electoral means?

A: We can only hope that the still large body of responsible people in the West German SPD will be able to keep things under control.

When I talk to my SPD friends I tell them it's not because circumstances are difficult that you should adopt the attitude "We are your leaders hence we follow you." Those who take the ungainly posture of the proverbial ostrich usually get kicked in the most obvious place.

The French Socialists at the beginning of the '70s had problems with nuclear deterrence, but a small number of determined people who decided to think it through turned the party around to a coherent, sensible defense policy. My fearless forecast is that the same thing will happen in the SPD.

Q: Why isn't France affected by the same pacifist trends so prevalent in Germany and Britain? In terms of defense, French Socialists, if anything, have proved to be more effective in pushing for the deployment of Euromissiles than their conservative predecessors.

A: There is a great deal of stability in France when it comes to

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Shuttle links up to national security mission

News blackout signals US spaceflight turning point

By Robert C. Cowen
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Boston

The secrecy surrounding January's space shuttle flight and its military payload marks a turning point for the United States manned spaceflight program.

From Mercury 3 in 1961 to last month's shuttle satellite-rescue mission, all 46 manned flights have been open and essentially civilian in nature. Many astronauts have been, and still are, military officers. But they have been seconded to the civilian space agency to carry out civilian duties. Now they will do the Defense Department's (DOD) work on some missions — missions that defense officials say must involve large measures of secrecy to protect national security.

That is why defense officials were so startled Dec. 19 when the Washington Post, and subsequently other media, reported that the crew of Mission 51-C would launch a spy satellite and in very general terms described its capabilities.

Other news organizations, including the Associated Press, NBC News, and Aviation Week & Space Technology, had similar information. But they suppressed it at the request of defense officials, who argued that national security would be compromised if it were published.

Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger characterized the Post report as "the height of journalistic irresponsibility." Post executive editor Ben Bradlee replied that "there is nothing in the article that violates national security, and the public is ill-served by silence."

The virtual news blackout on Jaunary's flight may disappoint a public accustomed to daily accounts of astronaut adventures. But STS managers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) would like to have many more DOD missions. This is not because they have any passion for secrecy. It is because they know the shuttle system won't be economically viable without expected DOD business. And mission secrecy is part of the deal.

The Defense Department has fostered a new breed of military astronaut. Air Force Maj. Gary Payton, who will manage the Mission 51-C payload, is one of 25 members of the DOD's Manned Space Flight Engineer Corps. They have been recruited and trained specifically to handle military payloads by taking part in their development. Major Payton will work with four NASA astronauts — Navy Capt. Thomas Mattingly, mission commander; Air Force Lt. Col. Loren Shriver, shuttle pilot; and two mission specialists, Air Force Maj. Ellison Onizuka and Marine Lt. Col. James Buchli.

What military work has been done on past manned flights has been minor, as in the case of the Air Force experiment carried along on the fourth shuttle mission in 1982. On that occasion and for that experiment only, astronauts had secure communication with an Air Force control center in California instead of with the Mission Control Center in Houston.

But 20 percent of the 70 or so shuttle flights envisioned between now and 1990 are expected to be paid for by the Department of Defense. Many will be launched from a shuttle facility under construction at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. These missions are also expected to be carried out under the general secrecy rules announced officially at a Washington briefing last Tuesday. Worked out between Pentagon and NASA over many months, and already reported by the press, they contain nothing unexpected. The rules are to apply uniformly to all military shuttle missions even though the

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defense. In that sense, we are a reliable partner. At times, France, of course, aggravates its American friends because it doesn't always adopt the same positions on a number of foreign-policy questions, but when it bottom lines to fundamentals on security, we are as one.

The reason for this is that France has, first of all, given itself the modern instruments of a national defense policy, which include, of course, its independent nuclear deterrent, within the framework of the alliance. . . .

Q: So has Britain?

A: Britain's deterrent was developed more as an offshoot of the U.S. deterrent that gives some opinion-molders an identity problem that we don't have in France.

Another factor is that France for the past 40 years and for the first time in history has not had any enemies on its immediate borders.

We are not a "frontline state." This is a mistaken feeling because it only takes a couple of additional minutes for an SS-20 missile to hit a French target as opposed to a German one, but it does ease the psychological pressure.